

Message Text

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ACTION SCS-01

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FM AMEMBASSY MEXICO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4367

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: CARR

SUBJECT: MEXICAN REACTION TO SITUATION IN SANTA MARTA

REF: MEXICO 13716

1. SUMMARY: ON AUGUST 18, CONOFF WAS SUMMONED TO PREVENCIÓN SOCIAL TO DISCUSS THE AMERICAN PRISONER SITUATION IN SANTA MARTA WITH DIRECTOR DR. CESAR LECHUGA. DR. LECHUGA STATED HE HAD HEARD RUMORS THAT THE AMERICAN PRISONERS INTENDED TO CARRY OUT A SERIES OF DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE INCLUDING SELF IMMOLATION OF AN AMERICAN PRISONER, AND WARNED THAT HE WOULD TAKE STRICT MEASURES TO PREVENT SUCH INCIDENTS. END SUMMARY.

2. ON SHORT NOTICE, DR. LECHUGA UNEXPECTEDLY REQUESTED THE CONOFF COME TO HIS OFFICE ON AUGUST 18. PREFACING HIS REMARKS WITH THE STATEMENT THAT HE HAD HEARD SOME VERY UGLY RUMORS, HE ASKED IF THE EMBASSY WAS AWARE THAT THE AMERICAN PRISONERS IN SANTA MARTA WERE PLANNING A SERIES OF DEMONSTRATIONS WHICH WERE ALLEGEDLY UNCLASSIFIED

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TO CULMINATE IN THE SELF IMMOLATION OF ONE OF THE AMERICAN INMATES. CONOFF REPLIED THAT THE EMBASSY HAD RECEIVED A BLOOD STAINED SHEET AND A LETTER ADDRESSED TO PRESIDENT CARTER FROM THE PRISONERS AND HAD BEEN INFORMED BY THEM THAT THEY PLAN TO TAKE OTHER STEPS, BUT TO DATE THE EMBASSY HAD BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL IN ELICITING FROM THE AMERICAN PRISONERS WHAT OTHER ACTIONS OF PROTEST THEY

MIGHT BE PLANNING.

3. LAMENTING WHAT HE TERMED THE IMPROPRIETY OF THESE ACTS WHICH ONLY CAUSE FRICTION IN OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS, DR. LECHUGA EXPRESSED STRONG FEAR THAT IF AN AMERICAN

DID DIE IN SANTA MARTA IT WOULD PROBABLY BE THE RESULT OF MURDER, NOT SELF SACRIFICE.

4. NEXT, DR. LECHUGA OUTLINED THE DISCIPLINARY MEASURES HE IS TAKING AND PLANS TO TAKE TO CONTROL THE SITUATION AT SANTA MARTA:

A) AMERICAN PRISONERS ARE BEING WATCHED BY EXTRA GUARDS.

B) THE PRESS HAS BEEN DENIED ACCESS TO THE PRISONERS.

C) ALL SUPPLIES OF GASOLINE AND OTHER INFLAMMABLE COMBUSTIBLES HAVE BEEN PLACED UNDER LOCK AND KEY.

D) ATTEMPTS ON THE PART OF AMERICANS TO (SELF) SACRIFICE SOMEONE WILL RESULT IN THEIR BEING PLACED IN ISOLATION.

E) IN THE EVENT AN AMERICAN IS IMPLICATED IN ANY WAY IN ATTEMPTING TO CAUSE THE DEATH OF ONE OF HIS COUNTRY MEN, THE GOM WILL PROBABLY EXERCISE ITS RIGHT OF VETO SHOULD THAT PERSON OR PERSONS SEEK A TRANSFER UNDER THE UNCLASSIFIED

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TREATY OF THE EXECUTION OF PENAL SENTENCES.

5. IN REPLY, THE CONOFF EMPHASIZED THE EMBASSY'S CONCERN ABOUT THE WELFARE OF THE PRISONERS IN SANTA MARTA AND RECOMMENDED DR. LECHUGA TAKE WHATEVER MEASURES NECESSARY TO PROTECT THE PHYSICAL SAFETY OF THE AMERICAN PRISONERS. HE ALSO REQUESTED LECHUGA'S APPROVAL TO WARN THE AMCIT PRISONERS THAT IF ANY OF THEM BECAME INVOLVED IN THE DEATH OF ONE OF THEIR COMPANIONS IN SANTA MARTA THE GOM "WOULD PROBABLY VETO THAT PERSON OR PERSONS' REQUEST TO BE TRANSFERRED UNDER THE TREATY". DR. LECHUGA SPECIFICALLY ASKED THAT WE NOT RELAY TO THE PRISONERS INFORMATION ABOUT OTHER MEASURES HE OUTLINED IN PARAGRAPH 4.

6. THE CONOFF EXPRESSED HIS APPRECIATION FOR DR. LECHUGA'S FRANK DISCUSSION ABOUT SANTA MARTA AND PROMISED TO REPORT PROMPTLY OF ANY DEVELOPMENTS THAT CAME TO OUR ATTENTION DURING THE EMBASSY'S REGULAR PRISON VISITS TO THAT PENAL INSTITUTION. THE NEXT REGULAR VISIT TO SANTA MARTA IS SCHEDULED FOR AUGUST 19. CONOFFS WILL COUNSEL PRISONERS AGAINST RASH ACTIONS

WHICH MIGHT HARM THEIR OWN INTERESTS.
THOMPSON

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